

Recommendations for Improvements to Solid Waste Management

Dear Santa Fe County residents:

Last year Leidos/NewGen Strategies and Solutions (a consulting firm) completed a study of the solid waste services provided by Santa Fe County, the City of Santa Fe, and by the Solid Waste Management Agency (SWMA). The study evaluated the management of the three different entities and made recommendations as to how services could be provided in a more cost-effective manner, as well as recommendations for strategies to increase recycling.

This e-mail will focus on the recommendations regarding the operation of SWMA. First of all, to give a bit of background, SWMA is an independent quasi-governmental entity that is overseen by a Board that consists of three City Councilors (currently, Councilors Joe Maestas, Patti Bushee, and Signe Lindell) and three County Commissioners (currently, Commissioners Miguel Chavez, Henry Roybal, and myself). The Director of the Agency is Randall Kippenbrock. SWMA oversees the operation of the Caja del Rio Landfill and the Buckman Road Recycling and Transfer Station (BuRRT).

CURRENT OPERATIONS AND COSTS:

The Caja del Rio Landfill disposed of 152,000 tons of trash in 2014. Of that total, 65% was residential/commercial, 21% from construction and demolition, 11% transferred from BuRRT, and 3% miscellaneous. The Caja del Rio site includes the administration offices for SWMA, the cells that are used for the landfill operation, and a composting facility.

BuRRT is the facility that primarily handles recyclables, but it also accepts trash that will be eventually transferred to the landfill. In addition, it accepts:

- Household hazardous waste (in a separate facility)
- Green waste (that is ground in a shredder for mulch)
- Scrap tires
- White goods (appliances)
- E-Waste (computers, printers, televisions)

As you can imagine, all this service is not cheap. In fact, the SWMA budget for 2015 is estimated to be approximately \$7.74 million, and that number is expected to increase to \$8.63 million by 2018. I want to emphasize that landfilling is a great deal more expensive these days due to an increased awareness that we should not just dig a hole in the ground and dump our trash into it. We need to protect our groundwater, so the cells that will contain the trash are carefully constructed and lined. In addition, air quality is preserved by installation of gas collectors that route the methane produced by the trash to a specially-constructed burner that is able to almost completely burn the gases without discharging any pollutants into the atmosphere.

In addition, collecting recyclables is not cost neutral even though SWMA does receive some payment for such items as aluminum, cardboard, and some plastics. Part of the reason for this is that we in the Santa Fe area are very far from the markets for these materials. This means that the cost to separate and then transport the recyclables is, in general, more than we receive from selling them, apart from aluminum cans. Also, we in the County have made a policy decision that disposing of recyclables should be free for County residents.

In order to pay for the cost of processing recyclables, SWMA charges its customers (including the City and County solid waste utilities) \$40 per ton for landfilling trash, which is more than it actually costs, namely, about \$30.66 per ton. This over-recovery of costs at Caja del Rio supports all the services at BuRRT.

Just for your information, the costs in a year for processing various types of trash at BuRRT are as follows:

- Solid waste that will be transferred to the landfill	\$1.35 million
- Glass recycling (crushed into different sized pebbles for a variety of uses)	\$210,000
- Green waste processing (ground for mulch)	\$460,000
- Material Recovery Facility (separation and transport of other recyclables)	\$1.05 million

The cost of material recovery itemized above (i.e., processing the materials to be recycled) is somewhat offset by sales of the recyclables. However, the price of recyclables varies over time (sometimes dramatically) depending on what is happening in the markets.

BuRRT also handles white goods (appliances), tires, e-waste, and has a Household Hazardous Waste facility. Customers do pay to dispose of these items, but the cost of processing and transport is not fully covered.

LEIDOS RECOMMENDATIONS:

It was recommended that SWMA continue using the Caja del Rio landfill rather than transporting the trash to a cheaper landfill such as the one in Bernalillo County. The primary reason is that the transportation costs would far outweigh the cheaper dumping costs. In addition, the consultants felt that \$40/ton for disposal is an appropriate fee to charge. They also recommended that the landfill accept trash from neighboring counties when those counties have an emergency need for disposal.

Another important recommendation was that SWMA contract with a third party to transport recyclable materials to another Material Recovery Facility (MRF), rather than continuing to process them at the BuRRT facility in Santa Fe. There is a MRF in Albuquerque that accepts more kinds of recyclables than can be processed at BuRRT, so if our recyclables were taken to that facility, the residents of Santa Fe City and County would be able to recycle all plastics as well as cereal boxes — items that are not currently accepted. In addition, this recommendation will have the effect of saving significant amounts of money in the operation of BuRRT.

Another interesting recommendation is that SWMA contract with a third party to do the green-waste grinding and to start a composting operation to include food scraps. The grinding of green waste has been a real headache for SWMA over the years due to the fact that it is extremely difficult to keep grinders in good working order. So the consultants felt that it would be an advantage to let it be taken over by a private entity expert at that type of operation. In addition, it would be a major advantage to the community to have a professional composting operation so that more of the food scraps produced in our area be diverted from the landfill and used for something that would be beneficial. It is interesting to note that a significant percentage by weight of what currently goes into the landfill is food scraps that decompose to produce methane.

The final recommendation that I would like to highlight is regarding public outreach. The consultants felt that SWMA should take the lead in the development of solid waste and recycling messaging. People who live in the City and those who live in the unincorporated County areas would then get a consistent message about what can be recycled, as well as about the other services that SWMA provides.

SWMA BOARD MEETING LAST THURSDAY

I am pleased to report that the SWMA Board voted unanimously to accept all the recommendations made by the Leidos consultants and to give direction to staff to begin implementation,

Sincerely,

-Kathy Holian
Santa Fe County Commissioner, District 4
Office: 505-986-6205
Email: KHolian@santafecounty.org
(or KathleenSHolian@gmail.com)